

What was I thinking?

June 27, 2021



The Whole Story (Part I)

There are some weeks, when I remember I've started this series of weekly articles during the pandemic, that I wonder "what *was* I thinking? Why did I commit myself to writing these every week?" Actually, I don't think I made any promises to you or to myself that I would write something every week, and there have been some weeks when I didn't. When I send these out, sometimes I wonder, "Is anyone reading them? Are they any good? Am I making a difference?" But I have received many kind words of appreciation and I thank you for that. I thought those were the only people reading these articles, but in the weeks when I have not written anything, I've received e-mails from others who have said, "Why didn't I get my article? Did I miss something?" So, more are reading than I thought. There will be some weeks when I hang out my "gone fishing" sign and take some time off. We all need that sabbath rest, especially in summer.

I really did make a sign that I can hang outside my door when I'm on a Zoom meeting or need privacy to work. It reads, "Do not disturb the organist. He's disturbed enough already." I didn't make that up but it's appropriate.

Sometimes I am disturbed enough already. This week in proofing the bulletin, I believe Ryan Baer thought I had lost my marbles and didn't know what season it was. He asked me if I really meant to include the hymn *O Sing a Song of Bethlehem*. Yes, I did. I told him to read through all of the stanzas. The first does begin with Bethlehem, but the hymn tells the whole story, or most of it where Jesus is concerned. "O sing a song of Nazareth," "O sing a song of Galilee," and "O sing a song of Calvary." Each

stanza begins with a place and paints a picture of what happened there. The third stanza, about Galilee, includes the phrase about “him who walked upon the sea and bade its waves be still.” I find the rest of that stanza appropriate for our current turbulent days: “For though, like waves on Galilee, dark seas of trouble roll, when faith has heard the Master’s word, falls peace upon the soul.” The fourth stanza takes us to Calvary and crucifixion, but it ends with resurrection.

Back to Ryan’s question, why did I choose this hymn? Ryan is preaching on Acts 5: 17-42. The apostles are in prison, but an angel came, let them out, and said “Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life.” The *whole message* (my emphasis). Peter and the apostles did just that, telling the whole story in the temple.

30

O Sing a Song of Bethlehem

KINGSFOLD CMD English Country Songs, 1
 Arr. and harm. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1

Louis FitzGerald Benson, 1899

1. O sing a song of Beth-le-hem, Of shep-herds watch-ing there,
 2. O sing a song of Naz-a-reth, Of sun-ny days of joy,
 3. O sing a song of Gal-i-lee, Of lake and woods and hill,
 4. O sing a song of Cal-va-ry, Its glo-ry and dis-may;

And of the news that came to them From an-gels in the air:
 O sing of fra-grant flow-ers' breath, And of the sin-less Boy:
 Of Him who walked up-on the sea And bade its waves be still:
 Of Him who hung up-on the tree, And took our sins a-way:

The light that shone on Beth-le-hem Fills all the world to-day;
 For now the flowers of Naz-a-reth In ev-ery heart may grow;
 For though, like waves on Gal-i-lee, Dark seas of trou-ble roll,
 For He who died on Cal-va-ry Is ris-en from the grave,

Of Je-sus' birth and peace on earth The an-gels sing al-ways

(Part II)

The story continues for us. We tell the old story, and hopefully learn from it, but our own story is still unfolding and God is part of that. It's one thing to look back and see how things unfolded in the past. We can see decisions we and others made, and from the perspective of time we can usually see where we made good decisions and where we made mistakes. But when we're in the midst of something, particularly something difficult, it's hard to know what to do. We're in a difficult time now. People in positions of leadership are trying to make decisions, and it's really, really hard right now to know what's right and what's wrong. There are plenty of people around who are more than happy to share their opinions and tell us exactly what to do. But how do we know? Who do we listen to? Who and what do we trust for guidance? God, of course, but I haven't received any clear messages about what to do next in terms of this pandemic, have you?

I'm going to be honest and say I'm troubled and conflicted right now. I'm not sure what's best for the health and well-being of the people. This is a hard time.

Wednesday night this week, for choir rehearsal, I had chosen a closing prayer that we've used in choir before. It sums up how I feel these days, and I think the same is true for others. Whether we're on dark seas of trouble or on a road that seems dreary and endless, I pray God will guide us in the right direction and will give us comradeship with heroes and saints of every age, like those brave apostles. We're still telling and living the story.

God of life,
there are days when the burdens we carry
are heavy on our shoulders and weigh us down,
when the road seems dreary and endless,
the skies gray and threatening,
when our lives have no music in them,
and our hearts are lonely,
and our souls have lost their courage.
Flood the path with light,
turn our eyes to where the skies are full of promise;
tune our hearts to brave music;
give us the sense of comradeship
with heroes and saints of every age;
and so quicken our spirits
that we may be able to encourage
the souls of all who journey with us on the road of life,

to your honor and glory. Amen.(Attributed to Augustine of Hippo)

God be with you till we meet again.

John